

Op-Ed

Todd Lang, Citizens Clean Elections Commission

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In 1998, the citizens of Arizona realized a critical need to address the way statewide and legislative elections were being conducted. Recognizing a desire to remove special interest money from politics and level the playing field in relation to campaign financing, Arizona voters approved the ballot initiative establishing the Citizens Clean Elections Commission. Designed to encourage citizen participation in the political process and promote freedom of speech, the Act allows candidates to obtain full public funding to conduct their campaigns if they agree to spending limits.

Our own state, which serves as national model for campaign reform, is now entering into its fourth election cycle since the inception of the Act, yet opponents continue to challenge the success and intentions of the voter approved law. While these opponents have published various essays or reports to support their opposition to the law, none have asked citizens how they feel about the law or the importance of the Act to their participation in state elections. Instead various unsubstantiated figures or statements are being published in an attempt to imply that the law is wrong. However, at CCEC, we stand behind the rights of the state's citizens to choose a system they feel is fair and the popular vote in support of Clean Elections is a demonstration of just that.

A survey conducted in January 2006 by the Behavior Research Center shows that 85 percent of Arizonans surveyed feel that Clean Elections is important to Arizona. Additionally, of those surveyed, 25 percent believe a candidate who uses the Clean Elections system is more credible than those who do not. In contrast, only 10 percent believed a participating candidate is less credible. This survey proves a dramatic departure from what opponents would have the public believe.

Furthermore, opponents use the argument that the Act has not fulfilled one of its primary intentions of increasing participation. In fact, candidate and voter participation has increased every year that Clean Elections Act has been in existence. Since 2000, candidate participation in Clean Elections has increased from 29 percent to more than 60 percent in 2006. Additionally, while approximately 24,000 voters chose to contribute \$5 to a candidate's campaign in 2000, nearly 40,000 voters contributed in 2004. These numbers show that Arizonans are in fact getting involved in the election process and using Clean Elections to make sure their voices are heard and that their votes truly count.

Elections created a system in which more voices can be heard and shared in the marketplace of ideas. It permits voters to take a proactive stance in the election process and be stakeholders in electing the candidates they support. There are obviously challenges in creating a "perfect" law, however, the core purpose of the Act was designed to lessen the importance of money in statewide and legislative campaigns, and has in turn allowed more Arizonans to become involved in the political process.

To quote a famous Arizonan: "To be successful, representative government assumes that elections will be controlled by the citizenry at large, not by those who give the most money. Electors must believe their vote counts. Elected officials must owe their allegiance to the people, not to their own wealth or to the wealth of interest groups who speak only for the selfish fringes of the whole community." – Barry Goldwater